



The Lion

September 1994

The Newsletter of St. Mark's Parish of Denver, Colorado
The Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, Western Rite Vicariate

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"Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it (Acts 28.28)."

JUDGE NOT, THAT YOU BE NOT JUDGED

a Sermon of

St. John Chrysostom

WOULD you say we should not blame those who sin? Christ, speaking through Paul, said, "Why do you judge your brother?" and "Who are you that you judge another man's servant? Judge nothing until the time that the Lord comes."

TO SCOLD OR PUNISH.

How is it then, in the light of those statements, Christ says elsewhere: "Reprove, rebuke, exhort," and, "Those who sin should be rebuked"? Christ also said to Peter, "Go tell him his fault, between you and him privately, and if he ignores you, bring another person with you, and if he still ignores you, declare it to the church."

How is it that he instructs us not only to reprove, but to punish?

If His Apostles are not to judge, they will lack authority in any matter, and in vain would have received the power to bind and to loose.

If the master does not judge the servant, the mistress the maid, the father the son and friends each other, there will be an increase of all wickedness. If we do not judge our enemies, we shall never be able to end our enmity, and all things will be turned upside down.

Why then the seeming contradictions? Let us carefully review the seemingly opposed exhortations so that the medicine of salvation and the law of peace not be considered by any man to be laws of overthrow and confusion.

To provide insight, Christ asks: "Why do you behold the mote in your brother's eye, but ignore the beam in your own?" I believe He here distinguishes between matters that merit judgment and trifling issues that should be ignored. He points out the hypocrisy of accusing one's neighbor of small faults, while committing deadly sins yourself.

In this context, He upbraided those who "pay tithe of mint and anise, yet have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and

In this issue of the LION find:

1) St. John Chrysostom on the Christian duty to "reprove, rebuke, exhort" and "Judge not" in all Charity.

2) News of the ever larger Western Rite Conference in Denver this August 16-18.

3) News of the Parish and Deanery

4) Fr. Patrick Henry Reardon on Christology and the Psalter which will be concluded in the October LION with reference to the "inclusive" Psalms of the ECUSA's 1979 "BCP" and its many imitations such as the *Lutheran Book of Worship* and the *New RSV Bible*.

faith." Along these same lines he said, "You which strain at the gnat, and swallow the camel."

Paul's instruction to the Corinthians was not an absolute command not to judge, but a rebuke of those disciples who judged their superiors. He warned, "For with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged." In Christ's words, "It is not the other whom you condemn, but yourself; you make the judgment seat dreadful for yourself."

Do not trample, but admonish. Do not revile, but advise. Do not assail with pride, but correct with tenderness.

These commandments offer great blessings to the obedient, but great evil for those who ignore them.

"All right," you say, "if one commits fornication, may I not say that fornication is a bad thing and correct the person who fornicates?" Yes, correct him—but as a physician providing medicines, not as an adversary exacting a penalty. Be not bitter in pronouncing sentence.

Many behold the mote in their brother's eye. If they see a monk wearing an unnecessary garment, they bring the law of our Lord against him, while at the same time they themselves extort and defraud without end. If they see the monk overeating, they become bitter accusers, while they themselves daily eat and drink to excess.

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JUDGE YOURSELF FIRST

If you judge your brother, be sure to judge yourself first. Care about the one you judge, and judge him not for things you yourself are guilty of. "For it is not at all meet," said Christ, "to judge others, when one is chargeable with the same thing." If it is an evil not to see one's own faults, it is a greater evil to sit in judgment on others, while bearing about beams in your own eyes.

Christ does not object to correcting one's fellow men, but warns against our neglecting our own faults and exulting over those of other men.

Some have been confused by what might seem to be another contradiction in His words. He said, "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast you your pearls before swine." Yet He also said, "What you have heard in the ear, that preach you upon the housetops."

He refers figuratively to "dogs" as those living in incurable ungodliness; to "swine" as those who abide continually in an unchaste life. Paul referred to them as "those who would not receive things of the Spirit, for they seem to be foolishness to them." Corruption in life is the obstacle to one's receiving the more perfect doctrines, as a corrupt man becomes even more insolent after learning.

Paul said to Timothy, "If a man is a heretic, admonish him. If you must admonish him a second time, then reject him." Such a person becomes even more willful and scornful of the truth if he is equipped with the truth. Thus their mischief is compounded. They still do not profit, but they then manage to cause even greater difficulties.

We celebrate the mysteries behind closed doors and keep out the uninitiated, not because of weakness or uncertainty, but because the uninitiated are not adequately prepared to accept them.

PATIENCE IN ASKING

Christ said, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." He thus commanded us to ask, and pledged Himself to the giving. But this implies asking earnestly and sincerely, putting all other things out of our minds. He also urges patience, warning that the door may not open immediately, but that we should persist in our knocking.

If you continue asking, though the answer is not there at once, you surely will receive. This was why the door was shut—that you would take the initiative to knock. The answer may not be immediately forthcoming in order to determine if you will persist in asking.

The answer will come. Would you, as a father, respond with a stone when your son asks for bread? Consider that if you persist in asking, yet

receive not, maybe you are asking for a stone. The fact you are the son does not assure that you will be asking for something worthy. So ask for nothing worldly. Being a son can, in fact, work to your disadvantage, since you may then be more likely to ask for that which does not have merit.

There are two essentials to effective prayer: 1) that you pray earnestly, and 2) that you ask that which you ought to ask.

If you claim to have asked for spiritual benefits, but did not receive, it is because you did not "knock at the door" with sufficient earnestness, or you have in other ways made yourself unworthy to receive what you ask, or did cease your prayers prematurely. In no case is God responsible for prayers being unanswered. If we, being evil, know how to give good gifts to our children, our heavenly Father knows even better how to provide for our needs.

One should not have such confidence in prayer alone that he neglects performing good works; nor should one trust only in his own efforts. We should instead seek help from above, while also contributing our own efforts.

"In all things," He said, "whatsoever you would have men do to you, you also should do to them." Virtue is consistent with each of our natures. Each of us knows his duties, so it is not possible for us to find any excuse in being ignorant of what we should do.

THE GATE IS WELL-MARKED

Christ said, "Enter through the straight gate. The gate that leads to destruction is wide and the way is broad, and many enter there. But the gate that leads to life is straight and narrow, and few find it."

But then He also said, "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light," which to some appears to contradict his reference to a "straight and narrow" way. How, they ask, can the straight and narrow way be "easy"? It is easy because it is well marked. It is no less approachable than the wide and broad gate. These are but signs, like all of mortal life, and they also pass away—the pains, as well as the good things, of life.

This should be enough to console those in conflict: that our labors are temporary in nature, while our crowns are perpetual. We know that the labors come first, with the promise of the crowns proving a great relief during our toils. Paul himself referred to man's afflictions as being "light", not in their nature—which is difficult—but because of the hope we have in the future. "Our light affliction," he said, "produces an eternal weight of glory, as we look not at the things which are seen, but at those which are not seen."

If sailors endure the dangers of the sea, soldiers the slaughter of battle and boxers the

blows of the matches for temporary earthly rewards, how much more should they be willing to endure for the unspeakable rewards of eternity.

As to the gate, consider not whether it be rough and narrow or wide and smooth, but where it takes you.

Christ puts emphasis on these matters to awaken our concern. When one is being evaluated, and sees the judge marvelling at the pain of his efforts, he is encouraged to greater effort.

So let us not be bewildered by surface contradictions, for the way may be narrow and straight, but the city isn't. One should not look for rest or relief from pain while yet on the road. Rest and relief and reward await at the destination.

The struggle to follow the straight and narrow road is compounded by the fact along the side of the road are many who would interfere with our progress.

BEWARE OF FALSE PROPHETS

Christ warned: "Beware of false prophets, for they will come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves." They constitute a far more grievous danger than the dogs and swine. The latter are open in their conspiracy. **But the wolves lie hidden; they are shaded over.**

Remember that for every truth the devil always secretly is substituting its appropriate deceit.

Christ's reference to "false prophets" is not, I think, a reference to heretics, but instead to those who wear a mask of virtue, while leading a corrupt life. Recognize them through Christ's admonition: "By their fruits you shall know them." **Among heretics one may often find actual goodness, but never among the hypocritical masks of virtue.** We must look behind the masks, and follow only those who sincerely pursue the truth.

One might ask, "Why did not Christ make the hypocrites evident to us, instead of requiring us to search them out?" He asks that we watch alertly, always prepared for conflict, guarding against disguised threats, as well as open enemies. Paul warned about the hidden danger, saying, "by their good words they deceive the hearts of the simple".

As Christ said, we must recognize them by their fruits: "Do men gather grapes of thorns-or figs of thistles? So it is that every good tree brings forth good fruit, but the corrupt tree brings forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit."

That raises the natural question: "Cannot a

good man become wicked and a wicked man become good?" Christ, however, does not deny the possibility of such a change. What he does say is that so long as a person lives in wickedness, he is not able to bear good fruit. But that does not deny the possibility of his changing, and thus through a virtuous life being able to produce good fruit.

CHRIST'S REJECTION WILL BE UNBEARABLE.

Christ warned: "Every tree that does not bring forth good fruit is cut down and cast into the fire."

To be burned also means being cast out of God's kingdom, and that latter punishment is by far the greater. The loss of heaven is far greater punishment than the pain of hell. How great an evil it is to fall from the good things of heaven cannot accurately be told. No doubt hell is a

thing not able to be borne. Yet, though one imagines 10,000 hells, it cannot compare to the trauma of hearing Christ say, "I know you not". It is better to endure a thousand thunderbolts than to see that face of mildness turn away from us, that eye of peace not willing to look upon us.

If He gave Himself over to death for those who turned away from Him, how could we not so much as offer Him a crust of bread when He hungered?

But even here we see His gentleness, as He refuses to complain that man has despised Him Who has done so much good for man. He might easily remind us that it was He Who breathed into man a soul, Who set him over all things on earth, in the sea and in the air; that He endured beatings, spittings and a shameful death as an intercession for man. But He does not. He mentions only the sin itself.

He prepared the fire not for us, but the devil. If we must endure the fire, it is because we have chosen it.

Therefore, what amount of punishment can be as grievous to us as these words from Him Who created us and loved us? If we had a human benefactor whom we later neglected, would we not choose to sink into the earth rather than be reminded of it in the presence of two or three friends? What, then, would be our feelings if we were to have our in gratitude spoken of in the presence of the whole world?

Let us, then, beloved, fear the hearing of these words. One might want to consider this mortal life a plaything. But the things to come are not. Though one might wish to consider this life a plaything, it does not end in laughter, but in exceeding damage for those who do not heed the warning to put their lives in order.

Christ's reference to "false prophets" is not, I think, a reference to heretics, but instead to those who wear a mask of virtue, while leading a corrupt life.

THE NEED FOR SPIRITUAL WORKS

What is the difference between children playing at building houses and us when we are building our fine houses? Or the difference between children playing at preparing dinner and us in setting out our delicate fare? If we do not yet perceive the poverty of what is going on, we are not yet become men, but are tied to mortal, material things. When we become men—matured children of God—we shall know that all these material concerns are childish. As we grow to manhood, we laugh to scorn those things which, as children, we accounted worthy of anxiety.

The walls of the great houses we build in this life will perish and fall down. But even while standing, they can be of no real use to him who will be the citizen of Heaven. He who has his country above can neither receive them nor bear to abide in them.

Let us, therefore, become men. How long are we to crawl on the earth, priding ourselves on stones and wood? How long are we to play? And would that it were play only! But in so doing we betray our own salvation, just as children—when they neglect their lessons and practice only at their leisure—suffer severe blows. Thus we, too, squandering our diligence on mortal activities and leaving little time for our spiritual lessons, later must pay the greater penalty when our spiritual works are required of us, and we have not prepared them.

When that time comes, there shall be none to deliver us—not even father or brother. But while these things shall all pass away, the torment resulting from them will remain immortal and unceasing. We shall be like children, whose father destroys their childish toys because of their idleness, causing them to weep unceasingly.

To make the message more clear, let us consider wealth—that which more than anything else seems to merit our earthly pains—and let us set against it a virtue of the soul. For our example, let us suppose there are two men who possess honestly-gained wealth.

BE CLOTHED IN VIRTUE

Let us assume one finds many ways to materially invest his money—merchandising on the sea as well as on the land. We will assume that he buys fields and slaves and increases his gains without dishonesty. As for the other who possesses equally much, he sells all he has and gives what he has to the poor. Of the two, whom would you respect the most? For now, let us not yet consider the future life, but just the immediate life on earth. In that context, whom would you choose to identify with—that man who continues to gather gold, or the one who makes of himself a harbor of refuge for the human race? Is not the one like some angel come down from Heaven for the relief of mankind, while

the other—like some little child—continues to gather to himself material gain in vain?

If the amassing of earthly wealth is so absurd, even when done honestly, one can see the madness of such a way of life when it is followed dishonestly.

Why does man take such pride in himself? Is it that he is clothed in beautiful garments. But compared to the man who is clad with virtue, such rich attire is like a pile of withering hay. Beautiful garments are good for worms and moths. When they set upon such a man, they will strip him bare, for garments, gold and silver are the spinning of worms. But he who is clothed in virtue cannot be harmed by worms nor even by death itself, for virtues of the soul do not have their origin from the earth. They are fruit of the Spirit, and cannot be subject to the mouths of worms.

Which then is better, tell me? To be rich, or to be poor? To be in Power, or in dishonor? In luxury, or in hunger? It is quite clear; to be in honor, and enjoyment, and wealth of almsgiving

Therefore leave the earth and what is here, and find for yourself a place to anchor in Heaven. What is here is but a shadow. But all things there are immovable, steadfast and beyond any assault.

Let us therefore choose them with all diligent care, that we may be delivered from the turmoil of the things here. Having sailed in that calm harbor, may we be found with much abundance and wealth of almsgiving, which God grant that we may all attain, by the grace and love towards man of our Lord Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory and the might, world without end. Amen.

This text of St. John Chrysostom follows the form of the booklet published by OLOGOS press, the Rev. George Mastrantonis, Editor. Most of the OLOGOS booklets are available in St. Mark's Bookstore. They are a useful spiritual resource.



His Grace, Bishop Basil blesses the new Icon of St. Tikhon, Patriarch Confessor, at St. Mark's, Denver.

Parish and Deanery news

HIS GRACE, Bishop Basil preached a most encouraging sermon to over two hundred of the Faithful packed into St. Mark's for Vespers, Icon blessing, and a Litany of the Saints. Members of St. Mark's, those registered for the Conference (over seventy this year), and Clergy and Laity from sister Orthodox Parishes, filled the pews and the isles to see the new Icon of St. Tikhon, Patriarch and Confessor, blessed by Bishop Basil.

The Vesper service marked the concluding event of the first busy day, August 16, of the II annual Western Rite Conference. We thank the Choir who led the Vesper Service and the Church Women who served the Reception for all our guests. Deborah Connely prepared the Bookstore for the Faithful who bought books and icon prints and crosses.

The new Icon of St. Tikhon, Patriarch and Confessor, Patron Saint of Western Orthodoxy, and Enlightener of America, was written by Flora Baker of St. Luke Parish. This Icon was commissioned by Deborah Campbell Connely and was completed in time for consecration during the Western Rite Conference.

We thank the Rt. Rev'd Fr. Michael Trigg, Dean of the West Coast and Deacon Andrew, the Subdeacon and Mass crew, for the beautiful opening Eucharist of the Conference on Tuesday. Fr. Stephen Walinski and Deacon Edwin Aasen and young Ed. Aasen served a lovely Benediction service after Matins on Thursday. We thank all those Clergy and Laity who served at the various Offices and Masses during the Conference.

The Very Rev'd Edward W. Hughes, Co-Chairman of the Liturgics Department of the Archdiocese, & Warden of the St. George Institute, was principal lecturer. He brought many pale green books filled with rubrics and ancient texts to instruct the Faithful in the venerable practices of Western Orthodoxy.

It would appear that the Western Rite Conference will occur in 1995 following the Dormition, the 16 - 18 August, which will be Wednesday, Thursday, Friday. It also appears that the Conference be hosted by St. Mark's Parish at the St. Thomas Seminary as we are the "low bidder" for an adequate facility. Final decisions on these arrangements will be made by the Vicar General, The Very Rev'd Paul Schneirla, early next year.

Congratulations to Theodore John Eklund and Raymond (Venerable Bede) P. Tripp upon their ordination as Subdeacons and to The V. Rev'd Alexy Young and Rt. Rev'd John Mangels upon their elevations to those preferments.

Mr. James K. Jeffrey of St. Mark's Parish has been enrolled by the Rector in the St. Stephen Course of Studies offered by the Archdiocese. James will add

about eight hours per week of study to his schedule. This Course requires three years to completion.

Fr. Lester Bundy will be Celebrant at the 10 o'clock Divine Liturgy at St. Mark's on September 11. He and members of St. Columba Mission will be visiting that Sunday. They will join St. Peter & Paul at their new Church facility on the 18th and then move to the old St. Peter and Paul Church on Jay Road in Boulder beginning Sunday, September 25.

The annual St. Mark open Golf Tournament will be played at the Indian Peaks, Monday, October 10. Call Jack Davis at 778-1943 for details.

Susan Tripp, Altar Guild Director, summons the Altar Guild members to a meeting at St. Mark's on Sunday, September 25 at about 9:00 AM.

Thanks to the Vestry for the largest and best St. Mark's Dormition parish picnic so far. The parishioners gathered at Washington Park near the north lake and enjoyed food and fellowship. Thanks to all for a wonderful Sunday afternoon. In the photo below, second from left is Agnes Stott who joined St. Mark's in 1923 and fourth from the right is Tom Paszkiewicz who joined the Parish in 1994.



Bishop Isaiah reminds us that the Pan-Orthodox Ethnic Festival, a fund raiser for the OCOC, is Saturday, September 10 at 6:00 PM. Tickets are available in the St. Mark's Bookstore for \$ 15.00 for adults and \$ 5 for children. Thanks to all who have brought food and men's clothing for the OCOC & Mother Elizabeth's ministry at the Center.

The Church Women will meet at 10:00 AM Saturday, September 10 to work on crafts. The English Tea committee will meet Saturday, September 17 to plan for the October Craft Fair.

St. Mark Church Bonds are available in maturities of 10 years at 6 % and five years at 5% simple interest paid semi-annually. The Parish needs to sell about \$50,000 more in bonds of 5, 10, or 15 year maturity to complete refinancing. Call Dr. Max Greenlee at 442-3425 for information. †

September 1994

SUN

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SAT

				1 St. Giles, Ab 8:30 AM Holy Eucharist	2 St. Stephen King of Hungary 8:30 AM Holy Eucharist	3 FERIA 8:30 AM Holy Eucharist 6:30 PM Evensong
4 X Trinity 7:30 AM Morning Prayer 8:00 AM Holy Communion & Sermon 9:10 AM Evangelist Class 10:00 AM Divine Liturgy 4:00 PM Evensong	5 FERIA Please remember Mother Elizabeth and the Outreach Center !	6 FERIA	7 St. Cloud, Confessor 12:10 PM Holy Eucharist	8 Nativity of the BVCO 8:30 AM Holy Eucharist 7:00 PM Choir Practice	9 St. Gorgonius, Martyr 8:30 AM Holy Eucharist	10 FERIA 8:30 AM Holy Eucharist 10:00 AM Church Women meet today 6:00 PM Pan Orthodox Ethnic Festival
11 XI Trinity 7:30 AM Morning Prayer 8:00 AM Holy Communion & Sermon 9:00 AM Church School for All 10:00 AM Divine Liturgy 11:15 AM Junior Choir 4:00 PM Evensong	12 FERIA Pray for our Missions and Parishes ! 7:00 PM DESTRY	13 St. Cyprian of Carthage	14 Exaltation of the Holy CROSS 12:10 PM Holy Eucharist	15 St. Nicomedes, Martyr 8:30 AM Holy Eucharist 7:00 PM Choir Practice	16 St. Ninian, Bishop Confessor 8:30 AM Holy Eucharist	17 St. Lambert, Bishop Martyr 8:30 AM Holy Eucharist 10:00 AM English Tea Committee 6:30 PM Evensong
18 XII Trinity 7:30 AM Morning Prayer 8:00 AM Holy Communion & Sermon 9:00 AM Church School for All 10:00 AM Divine Liturgy 11:15 AM Junior Choir 4:00 PM Evensong	19 Pray for the Orthodox Mission in England St. Theodore of CANTERBURY, BC	20 St. Eustace & Companions	21 St. Matthew, Evangelist & Apostle 12:10 PM Holy Eucharist <u>7:00 PM GK Chesterton</u>	22 St. Maurice & Companions 8:30 AM Holy Eucharist 7:00 PM Choir Practice <u>7:00 PM CS Lewis</u>	23 Ember Friday 8:30 AM Holy Eucharist	24 Ember Saturday 8:30 AM Holy Eucharist 6:30 PM Evensong
25 XIII Trinity 7:30 AM Morning Prayer 8:00 AM Holy Communion & Sermon 9:00 AM Church School for All 10:00 AM Divine Liturgy 11:15 AM Junior Choir 4:00 PM Evensong	26 Intercede for Teachers & Iconographers Pray for all Monastics & Catechists! Ss. Cyprian BM & Justina Virgin Martyr	27 Ss. Cosmas & Damian, Mm	28 St. Wenceslas, Duke of Bohemia, Martyr 12:10 PM Holy Eucharist	29 St. Michael & All Angels 6:30 PM Divine Liturgy 7:00 PM Choir Practice	30 St. Jerome, CO & St. Gregory Illuminator 8:30 AM Holy Eucharist	

St. Mark's celebrates the 200 th year of Orthodoxy in America & the 90 th year since Archbishop Tikhon's Visit to this Parish & the 179th year since its founding.

CHRISTOLOGY and the Psalter

Father Patrick Henry Reardon

Rector of St. Anthony Orthodox Church, Butler, Pennsylvania

THE lovely title of a recent book summarizes my simple thesis in the following reflections. It is called *Psalter for the Christian People*, a name suggesting that the Psalms have a necessary and important place in Christian thought and worship. Indeed, such has been the persuasion of the Church from the very beginning. The New Testament tells us to address one another with psalms (Ephesians 5:19), to teach and admonish one another with them (Colossians 3:16), and to sing them (James 5:13). After the Lord's Ascension the believers turned immediately to the Book of Psalms for guidance. The Church's first canonical act, choosing a replacement for Judas, was explicitly based on a text from the Book of Psalms (cf. Acts 1:20). Again, two psalms were quoted and interpreted in that first sermon on Pentecost Day (cf. Acts 2:25-35). The Psalter is the Old Testament book most frequently cited in the New Testament.

The history of Christian prayer also bears witness to the distinct dominance of the Psalms. For example, in prescribing that a monastic community is to pray its way through the full Psalter each week, Chapter 18 of the *Rule of St. Benedict*, in the sixth century, recalls that the monks at an earlier and more devout period had accomplished that task every day. Simplifying the Daily Office for the layman at a still later date, Archbishop Cranmer continued to maintain a major place for the Psalms in *The Book of Common Prayer*.¹

But why the Psalms? Why should Christians not simply stick with what seem to be more explicitly Christian prayers, such as the various canticles of the New Testament and other primitive Christian literature? To what purpose should we Christians burden our worship with so many culturally strange images and themes from the Psalter, such as kingship, city walls, blowing ram's horns, blood sacrifice, bows of bronze, cries for vengeance, harp music, sword battles, and oil dripping down somebody's robe? Doesn't this sort of thing tend to make our prayers a bit unreal?

The origins of this Christian attachment to the Book of Psalms go far back. It was the risen Lord

who taught the first Christians to discover "in the Law of Moses and in the Prophets and in the Psalms? the Spirit-given references to himself (Luke 24:44). It was in that very first gathering on Easter that the Christian Church began to discern the significance and the importance of the Psalms in their thought and worship. Put simply, the Psalter is a book of Christology; it is Christology in prayer form. This is the reason why, if Christians are to engage in truly Christian prayer-prayer "in Christ"—then the Psalms must be an integral and important element of that prayer. Thus, in what appears to be our first extant example of the use of a psalm in Christian worship, one observes that its impulse and interest are entirely Christological (cf. Acts 4:24-30 quoting Psalm 2). Prayer "in the name of Jesus" (cf. Acts 4:30 again) readily takes the form of psalmody. So has it been from the beginning.²

It is truly remarkable to note how this steady theme of Christology in the Psalms was shared by Christian authors who were otherwise so diverse: Eustathius of Antioch, Ambrose of Milan, John Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria, Augustine of Hippo, Gerohus of Reichersberg, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Martin Luther. Just limit ourselves, for now, to the last name on that list, we observe that Luther so consistently interpreted the Psalms in the light of the New Testament and Christian theology that sometimes this approach even determined how he translated them into German. He insisted on reading the Psalms precisely as a Christian and not following some "misleading Jewish slant."³ All the other writers on that list would have agreed with him.

THE IDENTITY AND VICTORY OF CHRIST

Although all of the Psalter refers to Christ and is properly to be prayed within the context of that reference, certain passages of the Psalms have from the beginning enjoyed a special prominence. A ready example is the opening line of Psalm 109 (Hebrew 110): "The Lord said to my Lord: Sit thou at my right hand." In the traditions reflected in the Synoptic Gospels, Christians remembered that Jesus had cited that verse in controversy with some of his rabbinic opponents (cf. Mark 12:36; Matthew 22:44; Luke

20:42) and that the context of his citation was the decisive and great kerygmatic question, the question of the Lord's identity: "What think ye of the Christ? Whose son is he?" In those few words of the Psalter, "the Lord said unto my Lord," Christians learned that Jesus is not only David's descendent but also his pre-existing Lord. he is the son not only of David, but of God.⁴

Having mysteriously addressed the identity of Christ, that same line of the psalm then goes on to speak of his triumphal enthronement. Scarcely any words of any psalm were more beloved of the first Christians than "Sit thou at my right hand." They were quoted in the first sermon of Pentecost (cf. Acts 2:34) and became the foundation of some of the most important Christological and soteriological statements of the New Testament (cf. Mark 16:19; Romans 8:34; Ephesians 1:20; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:13, 8:1, 10:12, 12:2).

Then, that same verse of the psalm goes on to refer to those who oppose the victory of Christ: "Until I make thine enemies thy footstool." Once again, those few words were to lay the basis for important dimensions of eschatology in the New Testament (cf. Acts 1:35f; 1 Corinthians 15:25; Ephesians 1:22; Hebrews 10:12f; and perhaps 1 Peter 3:22).

The remaining lines of this same psalm speak of still other grand dimensions of Christian doctrine. Most specifically, this is the psalm that identifies Jesus as "a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek," and this identification is made the major theme of the Epistle to the Hebrews, our psalm cited repeatedly throughout the development.

With so much Christian theology concentrated in a single psalm, and so much of it in the very first line of that psalm, it is no wonder that Psalm 109, the *Dixit Dominus*, rather quickly assumed a notable place in Christian worship, particularly on the Lord's Day. The use of this psalm as the solemn opening of Sunday Vespers, a feature still prevalent in the Western Church, seems to have its roots in the third century.⁵

Christology & the Psalter WILL BE CONTINUED IN THE OCTOBER **LION**: *Christ in His Mysteries, The Anthropology of the Incarnation, The Present Impiety.*

END NOTES:

1. A brief but useful discussion of psalmody in primitive Christian worship can be found in Josef Jungmann, *The Early Liturgy* (Notre Dame 1959), pp. 167f., 278-287. In the present article, I will follow the Church's ancient custom of citing the Psalms according to their numbering in the Septuagint and Vulgate versions, which is often one digit lower than in the rabbinic text and its various translations.

2. Notwithstanding a grateful reverence for my fascinating professor of yesteryear, I must dissent from Norbert Lohfink's view that "In Christian worship the psalms were first used at the end of the second century" (*The Psalter and Christian Meditation*, *Theology Digest* 40:2, Summer 1993, p.134). His conclusion rests solely on the relative silence of the scanty evidence, but Acts 4 is a clear testimony to the contrary. Fr. Lohfink is also impressed by the fact that the Psalter saw very little use in the public worship of Judaism at that time, but surely the christological themes perceived in the Psalms by the early Christians would have given them a special reason for adopting psalmody in their worship very early. Indeed, this curious inattention to Christology is the real problem I have with Fr. Lohfink's otherwise helpful article.

3. Cf. his 1531 "Defense of the Translation of the Psalms," *Luther's Works*, Volume 35, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1960), pp. 209-223, more specifically p.219: cf. also his 1545 "Preface to the Psalter," *ibid.* pp. 253-257.

4. Cf. Demetrios Trakatellis, *Authority and Passion: Christological Aspects of the Gospel According to Mark* (Brookline, Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1987), pp. 80-82, 198f.

5. Cf. Jungmann, *vol. cit.*, p. 107.

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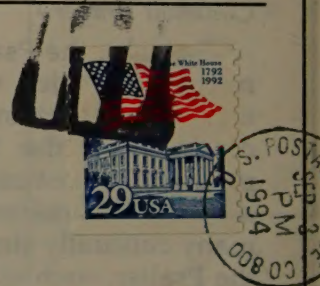
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